

# Am I Faithful to a Proud Heritage?

By

Senior Airman Wesley Cure, USAF

"I am faithful to a proud Heritage," from the Airmen's Creed is a powerful statement of loyalty, to which we as Airmen commit. Now consider this commitment in the form of a question: Am I faithful to a proud heritage? What does being faithful to a proud heritage entail? While standing by to participate as an Honor Guardsman during a recent veteran's funeral, I considered these questions with respect to my service to the nation as an Airman.

I believe we, as members of the armed services, have a vital responsibility to serve and protect our country. Based on my observations, Airmen take the duties we foster as protectors of our nation seriously and do so with a selfless passion. Along with the responsibility to our defend country, there is also an inherent commitment to uphold our Air Force customs and courtesies.

During basic training, all Airmen were diligently taught to honor our position by upholding Air Force customs and courtesies, which are comprised of fundamental behaviors and actions. Among those fundamental behaviors are the proper wearing of the uniform, appropriately engaging superiors, and the manner in which we interact with our cohorts. Customs and courtesies promote order and discipline, which are essential aspects of a functional military. Thanks to our outstanding training, patience, and dedication, all Airmen leave their initial training prepared to successfully serve our country honorably.

As some Airmen become further removed from their initial training, their commitment to Air Force customs and courtesies appear to waver and wane. This is based solely on observation, not empirical data. However, I think at one point or another, all of us has succumbed to negligence regarding theses necessary behaviors.

Perhaps the best way to explain this is through personal observation, and we've all had opportunities to observe similar examples. For instance, while walking to my work place I approached a Major on the sidewalk. As I prepared to salute, I realized the Major was holding her hat in front of her until she passed me. I chose not to salute the major, a decision I regretted later. I'm not sure why she chose to continue her journey outdoors sans cover. But as Airmen, we both had a responsibility in this situation. I should have extended the proper courtesies at our brief meeting no matter what. In this case, I perhaps also had a responsibility to courteously remind the major she was "out of uniform." But for any young enlisted Airman this is always a difficult situation. Often, doing the right thing is difficult if not downright hard.

The major had a responsibility as well. In fact, she had two responsibilities in this situation: First, adhere to appropriate wear of the uniform; second, to correct me when I failed to salute (regardless of the fact that that she was hatless).

This is only one example of failing to uphold our customs and courtesies. I am sure we have all witnessed a lack of commitment to this code of Air Force ethics: the young Airmen who dips back inside a building when he or she hears the National Anthem playing; the senior Noncommissioned Officer who nonchalantly walks out of the gym hatless while otherwise in uniform to negotiate a short walk to a parked car; the junior Airman who fails to stand up when a more senior military professional approaches his or her desk; the individual who negotiates a longer route across base to avoid opportunities to extend the proper courtesy of saluting; and the list could go on.

As I reflected on my personal observations, I was taken back to my time in basic military training. I can clearly remember my strong feelings of reverence for the Air Force culture and traditions. Every time I learned a new Air Force custom, I would swell with pride as I thought about the amazing generations who had done the exact same before me. We are building a legacy in one of the most honorable ways: protecting and defending our nation.

These emotions are strong and powerful when our careers first begin. Though some do seem to lose sight of this over time, others maintain their sense of pride, respect, and reverence. These members who openly show their pride are sometimes mislabeled “apple polishers,” “brown nosers,” and “militants” for their choices. This is unfortunate because their behavior is exactly the sort of demonstration of respect, care, and dedication that will lead us to a better, stronger, and more united Air Force.

All Airmen have voluntarily chosen to lead this life as military professionals. We live in an age where men and women join the military because of a personal desire to serve our democracy with a sense of passion and commitment. It is important we each rediscover that passion and reflect on our own personal choices. I have to believe the Major I mentioned earlier is not a poor officer. It would be difficult for me to consider any Airman as a poor Airman. But time, the pressures of balancing personal lives with the demands of military life, and a lack of situational awareness, often overcome even the best Airmen. We just need to pause and ask ourselves: Are we being faithful to a proud heritage? How can I better serve and pay respect to this heritage daily? As we search for answers, we can discover ways to enhance the Air Force borne on the backs of combatants, tested in times of war, and sanctified by those who have given their lives for us all.

*Senior Airman Wesley Cure is a financial management professional assigned to Air University's Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions & Citizen Development at Maxwell AFB, AL. The views expressed here are solely those of the author and may not represent the policies of the US Air Force or the Department of Defense.*